

even recognize visions offered of the world outside the self? In this context, writings such as Ralph Ellison's are seen merely as springboards for flights of fancy. Ellison, however, in this anecdote describing the interpretation imposed upon the school children, neatly distinguishes the art of "teaching *how* to think" from the authoritarian tradition of "teaching *what* to think."

We might hope for other, richer rewards from multi-ethnic studies than Bedrosian offers. Ethnic diversity has been and is increasingly a definition of the world we live in, a description of contemporary reality. Our ability to survive in this world may depend on the success with which we learn to balance our personal identities and social relationships in a pan-cultural environment. The historical perspective to be gained in studies of the ethnic diversity that created our society is necessary not to "re-imagine America" but to help us understand and respond to the world we live in.

At very least, the exposure to values, mores, and customs of other cultures will make us more comfortable with diversity and less threatened by it.

In our acceptance we will learn not only to tolerate but also to actively cherish and nurture a "diversified culture," abandoning the "... self-images that breed pessimism and fear ...," and with them the blindfolds of negativism and intolerance with which we cripple ourselves and paralyze our society.

—Gloria Eive

## Critique

Bedrosian presents an interesting discussion on spiritual dismemberment and a series of subjects which are related to this concept. As a researcher in crosscultural communication, I find the article to be relevant, not only with multi-ethnic literature, but with human communication processes as well.

America recently celebrated her 211th birthday. In context with older societies, the American culture is very much a great experiment. Our diversity of cultural backgrounds provides strengths and weaknesses.

One of the weaknesses, in contrast with older cultures, is that we have limited distinction with our ethnic backgrounds. The lack of depth in this area is due to the degree of breadth, or diversity of ethnic backgrounds, which exists. Consequently, there are millions in our nation who cannot accurately trace their bloodlines more than a few generations. The situation is compounded as bloodlines in America frequently involve multi-ethnic backgrounds. Thus, many of us have a "diluted" bond with our primary ethnic background.

Many Americans have sought to learn more about their *roots* and ethnic heritage. In 1977, the movie "Roots" inspired the culture as a whole to examine its many backgrounds and trace these backgrounds to

the present day. As the author points out, sometimes we run the risk of “discovering a history that one might prefer buried.” Nonetheless many people, myself included, have dug up family bloodlines and traced them back to their pre-American origins. There can be pleasant and unpleasant surprises along such a journey, but I think it is a worthwhile exercise to better understand family history.

Our culture is weak in ethnic distinctions but, in a crosscultural context, it offers a unique blend of many ethnic backgrounds. We have experienced intense violence as a result of interaction among some ethnic backgrounds and we have also experienced positive interchanges which have been based on common experiences. In my travels outside of the country I find many foreigners to be intrigued with this interchange among ethnic backgrounds.

I had the opportunity to teach in The People’s Republic of China during the spring of 1987 and was surprised to see many of my students referring to the “United States” as a noun but to “America” as a verb. We traced this usage to the active lifestyles lived in the American culture and also to the high degree of ethnic interaction which occurs here. This ethnic interaction is perceived to be some sort of great experiment much like our form of government has been viewed.

The author offers interesting observations on how we can work with this diversity and the possible role multi-ethnic literature plays in this process. Such efforts can be helpful to a number of academic disciplines. For instance, crosscultural human interaction is enhanced when the participants have a sensitivity for, and sometimes a tolerance of, other ethnic backgrounds. Communicative behaviors can easily convey unintended meanings and when participants are aware of potential problems the exchange can be enhanced considerably. Sensitivity and tolerance can be nurtured through an understanding of the literature described by the author.

Inquiry into the role of literature in this process is relevant as it enhances not only our ability to understand multi-ethnic interaction but also our ability to promote positive interactions in this area. Bedrosian offers interesting and beneficial ideas for this enquiry.

—Jim Schnell